

Field for Dissertations

Grade Retention as a Means of Selection

In the German school system, the practice of repeating a grade (grade retention) has long been common. Advocates of this practice expect a targeted support for under-performing students and in turn accept or tolerate a prolongation of school time for these students. However, national as well as international research shows that students who repeat a grade do not, as a rule, catch up. Moreover, the applicant has shown in the course of his PISA-research that grade retention is a means of selection which particularly discriminates immigrant students.

Despite of this, there still is one significant issue lacking research in German-speaking countries: So far, there has been no longitudinal study where learning progress is compared between students who repeated a grade and comparable, low-performing students that did not repeat but were promoted to a higher grade. Only such a quasi-experimental comparison would demonstrate the lack of learning progress for the 'repeaters'.

The results of such a study would not only be of importance for educational policy, but would also expand our knowledge about processes of selection and social inequality. It should be realized as a longitudinal study over three grades (6, 7, 8) making use of standardized tests (performance, intelligence) and standardized questionnaires.

The study should be carried out in three cities with high retention rates (e.g. Bremen, Oberhausen, Stuttgart); data collection should start with a full sample of one age group (grade 6) in the schools and should be coupled with federal central student assessments if possible.